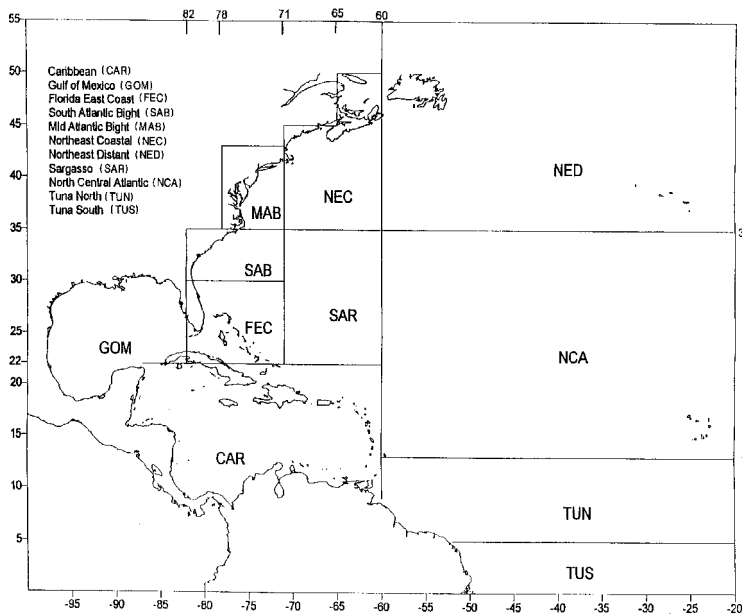


## NMFS PUBLISHES EMERGENCY RULE TO REDUCE SEA TURTLE BYCATCH AND BYCATCH MORTALITY IN HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES FISHERIES

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has issued an emergency rule to implement the reasonable and prudent alternative identified in the June 8, 2001, Biological Opinion to reduce bycatch and bycatch mortality of threatened loggerhead and endangered leatherback sea turtles. The closure and gear modifications required by the emergency rule affect all U.S. commercial fishermen who have been issued Federal highly migratory species (HMS) permits and use pelagic longline gear in the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Sea. The emergency rule also requires **ALL** U.S. commercial and recreational fishermen that have been issued HMS fishing permits to post sea turtle handling and release guidelines in the wheelhouse. The rule is effective as of July 11, 2001 and will be in place through January 9, 2002.

### *Area Closure*



Source: Cramer and Adams, 2000.

The Northeast Distant Statistical Reporting Area (NED) will be closed effective **July 15, 2001, through January 9, 2002, unless the rule is extended.** The closed area is bounded by the following coordinates: 35°00' N. lat., 60°00' W. long.; 55°00' N. lat., 60°00' W. long.; 55°00' N. lat., 20°00' W. long.; 35°00' N. lat., 20°00' W. long.; 35°00' N. lat., 60°00' W. long. For the duration of this emergency rule, vessels issued Atlantic HMS permits are prohibited from fishing with pelagic longline gear in the NED.

### *Gear Modifications*

Beginning August 1, 2001, through January 9, 2002, all vessels issued permits allowing pelagic longline fishing for HMS species will be required to modify how their gear is deployed. One modification requires that gangions be attached to the mainline at least two gangion lengths from

the floatline. The other modification requires that gangions be 10 percent longer than the floatlines, if the length of the floatline plus the length of the gangion is 100 meters or less.

*Sea Turtle Handling and Release Guidelines*

Effective September 15, 2001, through January 9, 2002, **ALL** Atlantic vessels that have been issued Federal HMS permits for any gear type and/or target species are required to post inside the wheelhouse NMFS issued guidelines for the safe handling of sea turtles. This measure will allow vessel captains to refer to the appropriate handling and release guidelines in the event a sea turtle is accidentally hooked or entangled. NMFS will distribute the guidelines via mail to all HMS permit holders and place the document on the Internet.

This FAX notice is a courtesy to the HMS fishery participants to help keep you informed about your fishery. Official notice of Federal fishing actions is made through filing such notice with the Office of Federal Register. For further information on this emergency rule and its requirements, contact Tyson Kade or Karyl Brewster-Geisz at 301-713-2347. Copies of the Environmental Assessment and Regulatory Impact Review and Emergency Rule are available per request from Highly Migratory Species Management Division, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910 (phone: 301-713-2347, fax: 301-713-1917). The information will also be posted on the HMS website at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hmspg.html>.

Bruce C. Morehead  
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries

July 11, 2001